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Item 17 of the provisional agenda
Arrangements for intergovernmental meetings

Frequency and organization of sessions

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document was prepared in response to the request made by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), at its fortieth session, for the secretariat to prepare a document outlining the various options relating to the frequency and organization of the sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) and their subsidiary bodies. Guided by the principles of openness, transparency and inclusiveness, the document presents possible scenarios and related implications for the various options, including arrangements for the sessions of the COP, the CMP and their subsidiary bodies and the high-level segment. The SBI is invited to consider the options and provide further guidance.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), at its fortieth session, requested the secretariat to prepare a document, guided by the principles of openness, transparency and inclusiveness, outlining the various options relating to the frequency and organization of the sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) and their subsidiary bodies, for consideration at SBI 41.[1]

B. Scope of the note

2. This document presents information on the current arrangements for annual sessions and proposes possible scenarios, options and budgetary implications (including funding available for the participation of eligible developing countries) for:

(a) Biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP;

(b) Annual sessions of the COP and the CMP at venues alternating every year between a host country and the seat of the secretariat;[2]

(c) The high-level segment.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

3. The SBI may wish to consider the options presented and provide further guidance on the possible options for the frequency and organization of the sessions of the COP, the CMP and their subsidiary bodies.

D. Background

4. The SBI periodically provides Parties with an opportunity to exchange views on the organization of their intergovernmental process and to take decisions on relevant matters. During such discussions, Parties have considered issues related to the frequency and timing of the sessions of the COP and the CMP and possible impacts on the work of the governing, subsidiary and constituted bodies and specialized groups under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol.[3] Most recently, SBI 36 invited[4] Parties to submit their views on ways to improve the intergovernmental process. Four submissions were received and made available on the UNFCCC website.[5] Several of the submissions presented similar views on the organization of the intergovernmental process, including proposals for permanent

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[1] FCCC/SBI/2014/8, paragraph 216(a).

[2] Rule 22 of the draft rules of procedure being applied (FCCC/CP/1996/2) states that the office of the President shall normally be subject to rotation among the five regional groups.

[3] See document FCCC/SBI/2005/2 for information on a relevant workshop held at COP 10; and see documents FCCC/SBI/2006/3, FCCC/SBI/2011/6, FCCC/SBI/2012/11 and FCCC/SBI/2014/6 for information on such discussions held at SBI 24, 34, 36 and 40, respectively.

[4] FCCC/SBI/2012/15, paragraph 238.

[5] For more information, see document FCCC/SBI/2014/6, paragraphs 24 and 25. The submissions are available at <http://unfccc.int/documentation/submissions_from_parties/items/8016.php>.

intersessional meetings, regular stocktaking and support for participation. In the submissions and during previous discussions, Parties expressed a range of views, which resulted in maintaining the current arrangements for the frequency and organization of the sessions of the COP, the CMP and their subsidiary bodies.

5. When considering possible changes to the frequency of the sessions of the COP and the CMP, Parties may wish to recall that the COP and the CMP are the supreme decision-making bodies of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, respectively. In addition to the sessions of the COP, the CMP and the subsidiary bodies, the calendar of intergovernmental meetings has become increasingly complex and crowded over the past five years. The work of various constituted bodies, including those launched under the Bali Action Plan, is a new component in the implementation of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol. The biennium 2014–2015 has also seen the launch of new work and meetings related to measurement, reporting and verification.

II. Frequency and organization of sessions

A. Current arrangements for annual sessions

6. Over the past two decades, United Nations Climate Change Conferences have grown into one of the largest annual conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations. The current arrangements for sessions of the COP and the CMP are typically as follows:

(a) Frequency of sessions: ordinary sessions of the COP and the CMP are convened once a year, while the two permanent subsidiary bodies (the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the SBI) usually meet twice a year. In addition, sessions of ad hoc, temporary subsidiary bodies (e.g. the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action) are held at least twice per year;

(b) Number of parallel sessions: the sessions of the COP and the CMP are regularly convened in parallel with those of the SBSTA and the SBI. At COP 18 and CMP 8, a total of seven separate bodies convened during the two-week meeting period. Two ad hoc subsidiary bodies have closed since then; however, at COP 20 and CMP 10 a total of five separate bodies will convene during the two-week meeting period;

(c) Agendas for sessions: the agendas for each of the Convention and Kyoto Protocol bodies can often include many issues for consideration. The sessions of the COP and the CMP are regularly convened in parallel with the sessions of multiple other bodies, each with lengthy agendas, resulting in complex and intensive negotiating meeting schedules;

(d) Scheduled dates for sessions: the dates for the annual sessions of the COP, the CMP, the SBSTA and the SBI are usually decided five years in advance;

(e) Participation at sessions: the number of participating Parties and observer organizations has increased over the years, corresponding with an increase in the required resources.

7. In addition to the COP, the CMP and their subsidiary bodies, there is a growing number of limited membership bodies, also called 'constituted' bodies (see annex II), committees, expert groups and processes that meet throughout the year to implement mandated activities.

B. Possible options for biennial sessions

8. Should Parties wish to shift to a biennial schedule for the sessions of the COP and the CMP, they may also wish to consider the frequency and timing of related sessions and meetings in the climate change intergovernmental process. The option of biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP may in general result in advancing more technical work under the subsidiary bodies, constituted bodies and other groups and processes, with the COP and the CMP convening to take decisions every other year. Parties may further wish to consider arrangements for any possible governing bodies of any related legal instruments that the COP may adopt in the future. In considering the scenario of biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP and the related implications, some options include, inter alia:

(a) The subsidiary bodies convening in conjunction with the biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP. They would also convene no fewer than three times between the sessions of the COP and the CMP, following the typical meeting schedule of May/June and November/December;

(b) The subsidiary bodies and any newly established ad hoc or permanent bodies convening in conjunction with the biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP. The subsidiary bodies would convene no fewer than three times in between the sessions of the COP and the CMP, following the typical meeting schedule of May/June and November/December. This would not prejudge the frequency of the meetings of any newly established ad hoc or permanent body;

(c) Biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP convened separately to the sessions of the subsidiary bodies. The sessions of the subsidiary bodies could follow the typical meeting schedule of May/June and November/December or a revised schedule (for example, they could meet in March and September of every year or convene in the week(s) leading up to the sessions of the COP and the CMP);

(d) Biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP convened separately to the sessions of any newly established ad hoc or permanent bodies or subsidiary bodies. The sessions of the subsidiary bodies could follow the typical meeting schedule of May/June and November/December or a revised schedule (for example, they could meet in March and September of every year or convene in the week(s) leading up to the sessions of the COP and the CMP). This would not prejudge the frequency of the meetings of any newly established ad hoc or permanent body.

9. Parties may wish to consider whether the options listed in paragraph 8 above would require there to be a high-level segment at each of the biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP or if a revised schedule for high-level engagement would be necessary.

10. The biennial meeting cycle of supreme decision-making bodies can be observed in a number of other intergovernmental treaty processes. Other intergovernmental processes and bodies, including meetings of governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, economic and trade agreements and high-level United Nations bodies, follow a biennial or triennial meeting schedule for their highest-level decision-making body, with their subsidiary bodies mandated to undertake much of the work in the interim (see annex I). The decision-making bodies of other Rio Conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), previously convened annually, but now do so biennially.[6] These bodies subsequently

[6] The Conference of the Parties to the CBD met annually for its first few sessions, but now meets biennially following a change in the rules of procedure in 2000 (CBD decision V/20). The Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD met annually for its first five sessions, from 1997 to 2001. Starting in 2001 the sessions have been held on a biennial basis (UNCCD decision 1/COP.2).

enhanced the roles of their subsidiary bodies, bureaux and ad hoc committees or mechanisms as they increased their focus on implementation.[7] Parties to these Conventions may still decide to hold extraordinary meetings between the regular sessions of the governing bodies, in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure. For example, the CBD held an extraordinary session of its Conference of the Parties to adopt the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

C. Possible related implications for biennial sessions

11. When considering the options for a biennial schedule for the sessions of the COP and the CMP and their possible related implications, Parties may wish to note the variation in the frequency and timing of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies presented in paragraph 8(c) and (d) above, which may, in particular, reflect a shift from the current arrangements for those sessions. However, all possible options for biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP would result in a range of possible implications, including, inter alia:

(a) Modalities for supporting arrangements between biennial sessions: administrative, institutional and organizational issues may require additional arrangements to be made for between biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP. Parties may wish to consider whether current arrangements are adequate, or whether adjustments may be necessary to the current arrangements of the subsidiary bodies, the Bureau of the COP and the CMP, and other committees and mechanisms to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the UNFCCC process;

(b) Election and role of the Bureau of the COP and the CMP: in accordance with the draft rules of procedure being applied,[8] members of the Bureau are elected for an initial term of one year and may serve in office for a maximum of two consecutive terms of one year. Parties may wish to consider possible adjustments to the roles and responsibilities of the Bureau and to the timing of the election and/or the term of office of members of the Bureau of the COP and the CMP and the Bureaux of the subsidiary bodies;[9]

(c) Modalities for reporting and adoption of decisions: the COP and the CMP review and take decisions on the work and mandates of the subsidiary and constituted bodies on an annual basis. Parties may wish to consider whether the timing of reporting and/or adoption of decisions by the subsidiary and/or constituted bodies may require adjustment. Parties may also wish to consider whether a high-level segment would be needed in conjunction with sessions of the COP and the CMP at which decisions are taken;

(d) Organization of agendas: Parties may wish to consider whether the current organization of agendas and the conduct of in-session work of the COP, the CMP and their subsidiary bodies are adequate, or whether adjustments may be necessary to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the subsidiary and constituted bodies during the biennial period.

12. When considering the option of biennial sessions of the COP and the CMP, Parties may wish to consider possible budgetary implications for core and supplementary funding, including funding for the participation of Parties in sessions. Parties may also wish to consider such implications taking into account the evolution of institutional arrangements.

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[7] In 2002, Parties to the CBD adopted the Strategic Plan for the Convention (2002–2010) and in 2004 established the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention (WGRI) (CBD decision VII/30, para. 23). In 2007, the UNCCD adopted its 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (UNCCD decision 3/COP.8), which defined the focus areas of both subsidiary bodies.

[8] FCCC/CP/1996/2.

[9] See document FCCC/SBI/2014/12.

D. Annual sessions at venues alternating every year between a host country and the seat of the secretariat

13. The draft rules of procedure being applied state that the sessions of the COP shall take place at the seat of the secretariat, unless the COP decides otherwise or other appropriate arrangements are made by the secretariat in consultation with Parties. Over the years, some sessions of the COP and the CMP have been convened at the seat of the secretariat (e.g. COP 5), but the sessions have been convened more frequently in countries that have offered to host them (e.g. COP 3, 7, 10 and onwards).

14. Given the request of SBI 40 to address the scenario and related implications of holding annual sessions of the COP and the CMP at venues alternating every year between a host country and the seat of the secretariat, Parties may wish to consider advance planning and decision-making by the COP to ensure that adequate time is available to put in place arrangements for the venues of future COP and CMP sessions.

15. Hosting sessions of the COP and the CMP is a major undertaking and carries considerable expense for the host country. Alternating the COP and CMP sessions every year between a host country and the seat of the secretariat would have additional budgetary implications for sessions held at the seat of the secretariat. Funding for the logistics and organization of COP and CMP sessions, normally the responsibility of the host country, would come from contributions made by Parties to the core budget.

16. Should Parties decide to alternate the venue of the sessions of the COP and the CMP, it should be noted that the rotation of the President of the COP and the CMP among regional groups would continue as determined by the draft rules of procedure being applied.[10]

E. High-level segment

17. All sessions of the COP and the CMP to date have included a high-level segment, typically held during the second week of the conference. The high-level segment has generally provided the opportunity:

(a) For ministers and other heads of delegation, as well as representatives of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, to deliver concise national statements;

(b) To advance agreement on major political issues;

(c) For ministers and others to engage in bilateral discussions;

(d) To demonstrate the prioritization of the UNFCCC process and ensure momentum;

(e) For networking and information-sharing among ministers and with observers;

(f) To increase public attention to the key climate change issues, including through national and international media.

18. The high-level segment usually includes an opening ceremony, often with the participation of Heads of State or Government and the United Nations Secretary-General, as well as national statements delivered by ministers and other heads of delegation. Group

[10] Rule 22 of the draft rules of procedure being applied states that the office of the President shall normally be subject to rotation among the five regional groups. For example, COP 5, held in Bonn, Germany, elected by acclamation Mr. Jan Szyszko (Poland) as its President (FCCC/CP/1999/6, para. 3).

statements, where other members of the group do not speak, are also heard. The high-level segment attracts considerable attention from the global media and observer organizations. The incoming Presidency of the COP and the CMP has traditionally been invited by the SBI (during its May/June session) to put in place some of the arrangements for the high-level segment in consultation with Parties and the secretariat. It should be noted that ministerial participation requires considerable time and planning by Parties. It places extra pressure on many delegations, particularly those of smaller and developing countries.

19. In the UNFCCC process, most sessions of the COP and the CMP have followed the traditional model of national statements being made during the high-level segment. Other modes of ministerial engagement during past high-level segments include the use of round tables,[11] discussion panels[12] and, more recently, high-level ministerial dialogues.[13] In this context, it may be relevant to note the examination by the SBI[14] of options for new channels for observer organizations to provide formal inputs to the high-level segment of the sessions of the COP and the CMP.

20. Parties may wish to consider the further engagement of ministers during the high-level segment and possible modalities to enhance and increase opportunities for more interactive discussion through open and dynamic exchanges of views, through, inter alia:

(a) Ministerial round tables and dialogues, possibly with specific issues or themes for input to the negotiations and discussion;

(b) Multiple, smaller-scale events with targeted themes focused on building high-level momentum and discussion, at which decisions would not be taken;

(c) National statements or statements on behalf of regional and/or negotiating groups delivered by ministers or other heads of delegation in written or video format posted on the UNFCCC website in advance of the high-level segment in lieu of oral statements being made from the podium.

21. During previous discussions on arrangements for intergovernmental meetings, some Parties questioned whether a high-level segment is necessary at each session of the COP and the CMP. Parties may wish to explore whether every session of the COP and the CMP requires a high-level segment, taking into account any possible changes to the frequency of the COP and CMP sessions, and to provide further guidance.

[11] At COP 8 (FCCC/CP/2002/7, paras. 140–144), COP 9 (FCCC/CP/2003/6, paras. 136–139, and annex I) and COP 14 (FCCC/CP/2008/7, para. 77).

[12] At COP 10 (FCCC/CP/2004/10, paras. 134 and 135, and annex I).

[13] At COP 19 (FCCC/CP/2013/1, para. 115) (further information is available at <http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/warsaw_nov_2013/application/pdf/hld_summary_191213.pdf>) and at COP 20 (FCCC/CP/2014/1, para. 116).

[14] FCCC/SBI/2012/15, paragraph 239.

Annex I

[English only]

Session schedules of other intergovernmental processes and bodies

Annual
The Meetings of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer[a]
The sessions of the Executive Body of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution[b]
The Ministerial Council Meeting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development[c]
The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development[d]
The United Nations Intergovernmental Forum on Forests[e]
The General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency[f]
Biennial
The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity[g]
The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety[h]

[a] The Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol takes place annually, while the Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer takes place once every three years. Said Conference of the Parties has two subsidiary bodies: the Open-ended Working Group of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, which meets once annually, mid-year, and the Implementation Committee under the Non-Compliance Procedure of the Montreal Protocol, which meets twice annually, mid-year.

[b] The Executive Body has three main subsidiary bodies, which, along with the Convention's Implementation Committee, report to it annually: the Working Group on Effects, the Steering Body to the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission for Air Pollutants in Europe, and the Working Group on Strategies and Review.

[c] In addition to the Ministerial Council Meetings, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) organizes the annual OECD Forum, which brings together leaders from business, government, labour, civil society and international organizations, and the biannual World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policies.

[d] The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) met annually from 1993 to 2012. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development replaced it in 2013. It meets every fourth year at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly.

[e] Established in 2000 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council by its resolution 2000/35, this high-level intergovernmental policy forum has met annually since 2001.

[f] The General Conference is held annually to approve the actions and budgets forwarded to it by the Board of Governors, which meets five times per year.

[g] The Conference of the Parties to this Convention now meets every two years, while its Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice meets annually. The ad hoc open-ended working groups currently include the Working Group on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS), the Working Group on Article 8(j), the Working Group on Protected Areas and the Working Group on the Review of Implementation of the Convention (WGRI).

[h] The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety meets in conjunction with the regular meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and has held six meetings to date.

The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification[i]
The meetings of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal[j]
The meetings of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade[j]
The meetings of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants[j]
The Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme[k]
The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization[l]
The Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization[m]
The Assembly of the International Maritime Organization[n]
Triennial and other schedules
The Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer[a]
The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora[o]
The Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat[p]
The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals[q]

[i] The Conference of the Parties to this Convention and its Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention meet in alternate years (both on a biennial basis).

[j] Simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions took place in 2010 and 2013, respectively. The three bodies recently agreed to convene their next round of meetings back-to-back in 2015, but without extraordinary meetings or a high-level segment.

[k] As the new governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Environment Assembly now meets biennially (UNEP Governing Council decision 27/2, contained in document UNEP/GC.27/17).

[l] The General Conference is held every two years. If required, it may also hold extraordinary sessions.

[m] Three bodies handle work between the Ministerial Conferences: the General Council, the Dispute Settlement Body and the Trade Policy Review Body.

[n] Between the sessions of the Assembly, a Council, consisting of 40 member States elected by the Assembly, acts as the governing body.

[o] The Conference of the Parties to this Convention meets every three years. The committees (Animals Committee, Plants Committee and Standing Committee) hold meetings every year when no Conference of the Parties is held.

[p] The Standing Committee oversees Convention affairs and the activities of the secretariat between ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Parties to this Convention. The Standing Committee normally meets once each year. In addition, it meets prior to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

[q] The Standing Committee and Scientific Council meet between sessions of the Conference of the Parties to this Convention, which meets triennially. The Standing Committee usually meets immediately before and after the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and, intersessionally, it usually meets once a year. The Scientific Council does not have a set frequency of meetings.

The Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention[r]

The Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons[s]

[r] The full name of the Aarhus Convention is the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The governing body of the Aarhus Convention is the Meeting of the Parties, which meets every 2–3 years. Its subsidiary body, the Working Group of the Parties, oversees the implementation of the work programme for the Convention between Meetings of the Parties. The subsidiary body has the same composition as the Meeting of the Parties but is mandated to meet at least once a year.

[s] Review Conferences of the Parties to this Treaty have been held every five years since 1975.

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Annex II

[English only]

Meetings of constituted bodies in 2013

Constituted bodies under the Convention	*Number of meeting days in 2013*
Adaptation Committee	10
Advisory Board of the Climate Technology Centre and Network	5
Consultative Group of Experts on National Communications from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention	6
Least Developed Countries Expert Group	8
Standing Committee on Finance	10
Technology Executive Committee	8
Constituted bodies under the Kyoto Protocol	*Number of meeting days in 2013*
Adaptation Fund Board	12
Compliance Committee	8
Executive Board of the clean development mechanism	28
Joint Implementation Supervisory Committee	6
Total number of meeting days	**101**